

R. Thornton Brodhead Armory Historic District

7600 E. Jefferson

Alternate name: Detroit Naval Armory

Local

State ✓ 10/2/80

State Marker ✓ 4/12/83

National



Wardroom in the Armory interior.
Painting by Fredenthal as part of the FAP.

Historic overview:

The Broadhead Armory stands as a reminder of Detroit's sea service heritage since 1930. It has served the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and their reserve and militia components. The building is an art deco structure designed by William Buck Stratton, and the interior houses the largest collection of federally-funded Depression-era artwork in any building in the state.

The militias were part of the state's military forces, reporting to the governor as commander in chief. Detroit's early naval reserves were generally well-off, having been comprised of the sons of Detroit's most prominent families. Known jokingly as the *champagne preserves* and *millionaire navy*, among the crew were many future famous Navy and Marine men. Coxswain Richard Thornton Brodhead would become the most prominent figure in the development of the Michigan Naval Militia. Construction began on the Armory in 1928. It would be used for a variety of purposes, from galas, training soldiers, political rallies and sporting events.

The Federal Art Project (FAP) was an agency designed to keep artists working during the Depression by applying their skills to decorate government buildings. Several artists worked in the armory from 1936-1941. The art themes are all naval and nautical. WWII brought the armory into mobilization mode, and the building was used for training reservists. Today the building is used for the reservists of the 1st Battalion, 24th Marine Regiment. The Brodhead Armory Preservation Society was founded in 1998 for the purpose of coordinating efforts for rehabilitation and maintenance.